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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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**BORDERS, CORRIDORS, and ECONOMICS**  
**The Keys to Stopping Cross Border Violence**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**Major Robert M. McLellan, U.S.M.C.**

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## *Preface*

This thesis explores three key elements that contribute to the transmission of violence. This work was undertaken in order to address the violence that has occurred in Mexico since 2006 and halt its spread into the United States. It is my intension that by identifying key elements that contribute to the spread of violence in narco-border regions a comprehensive national strategy can be formed that addresses the destabilizing elements occurring along the U.S. Southwestern border. These destabilizing elements cause violence to spread and cost U.S. tax payers millions of dollars annually.

I appreciate the professional assistance I received from the staff at the Grey Research Center located at the Marine Corps University aboard Quantico, VA, and the faculty at the University for their dedicated constant professionalism. I would also like to thank my Masters of Military Studies Mentor, Dr. Benjamin Jensen for his patients and guidance and my faculty advisor, LtCol John Dobes, USMC for his leadership. Most importantly I'd like to thank my family; to my parents for their encouragement, to my children Gus and Luke for their sacrifices, and to my wife Kristin for her support in making this accomplishment possible.

## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Borders, Corridors, and Economics the Keys to Stopping Cross Border Violence

**Author:** Major Robert M. McLellan, United States Marine Corps

**Thesis:** Illicit networks spread violence as a result of permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks.

**Discussion:** The Drug War in Mexico, which officially began December 11, 2006 with Mexican forces conducting Operation Michoacan, was in response to increased violence created by transnational criminal organizations, commonly referred to as Cartels. Over 50,000 people have been killed in Mexico's Drug war and the severity and occurrence of the violence continues to increase. The fractioned Cartels battle the Mexican government, which is struggling to restore rule of law, and rival cartel organizations. Cartel competition for control of the distribution networks into the United States fuels violence. It is estimated Cartels supply the United States with over 90% of the cocaine used in America, and earns \$48 billion dollars annually. The violence experienced in Mexico as a result of the war has begun to spread across the border into the United States. This violence will continue to spread and escalate in the United States if the situation is not addressed. This study uses case studies of the border regions of Colombia and Afghanistan to explore how the relationship between permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks contribute to the spread of violence. This study seeks to examine the factors that contribute to the spread of violence, and in so doing identify the key elements crucial to a comprehensive U.S. strategy to contain the violence and eliminate the factors that are causing it.

**Conclusion:** The violence occurring in Northern Mexico has escalated in the last seven years and is being transmitted across the U.S. border. Similar situations demonstrate that violence is a destabilizing force, and if left unchecked can spread very quickly. Nefarious actors destabilize regions and perpetuate the spread of violence as a result of permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks that allow illicit networks safe havens leading to the transmission of violence across borders. The United States must address these issues, and their root causes, if security is desired along the Southwestern border and within the heart land.



## *Argument*

In an article written on CNS December 15, 2011,

“The House committee called the situation along the U.S. border a “threat to national security,” and took up a bill sponsored by Republican congressmen that would treat Mexican drug cartels like terrorists and apply a counterinsurgency strategy to the growing violence along the Southern border. Rep. Connie Mack (R-Fla.) introduced H.R. 3401 the “Enhanced Border Security Act” on Nov. 9 to secure the U.S.-Mexico border, stop criminal access to U.S. financial institutions, and work with Mexico to implement counterinsurgency tactics to undermine the control of the drug cartels in the country. The bill would also double the number of Border Patrol agents, and provide additional infrastructure to secure the border, including “tactical double layered fencing.” Rep Connie Mack (R-Fl), who serves as the chairman of the Western Hemisphere subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, continued “A terrorist insurgency is being waged along our Southern border,” said Mack describing cartels that operate across Mexico, Central America and in over 1,000 American cities.” The congressman went on to state, “Drug traffickers and criminal organizations have combined efforts to work across borders, unravel government structures, and make large profits from diverse, illegal activity. The near-term result: schools, media and candidates all controlled by criminal organizations. In other words, total anarchy.”<sup>1</sup>

The proposed bill was not passed and the problems identified in the bill, along the U.S. Southwestern border, remain a threat to U.S. security. According to the United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime, “Organized crime threatens peace and human security, violates human rights and undermines economic, social, cultural, political and civil development of societies around the world.”<sup>2</sup> Transnational criminal organizations are extremely adaptable and are increasing in complexity and severity around the world. According to the United Nations Security Council, Trans-National Criminal Organizations (TNCO) are on the rise and are a severe threat to international security.

The TNCO that are on the rise are also closely linked to terrorism in their practice of violence to achieve goals and organized crime for profit. The relationship between TNCOs and terrorist organizations create a symbiotic relationship in which both mutually benefit from. “The 2009 National Intelligence Strategy described the nexus between terrorism and criminal activities as among the intelligence community’s top priorities.”<sup>3</sup> The growing threat was addressed in 2009 as part of the National Intelligence Strategy and was addressed specifically by the Obama administration to counter the

emerging threat. “In July 2011, for example, the Obama Administration issued the *Strategy to Combat Transnational Organized Crime*, which emphasized, among other issues, the confluence of crime and terrorism as a major factor in threatening the U.S. global security interests. Collaboration can serve as a force multiplier for both criminal and terrorist groups, bolstering their capabilities, strengthening their infrastructure, and increasing their wealth.”<sup>4</sup> The collaboration of these organizations is a result of many contributing factors and threatens the stability of the regions they operate in.

The negative affects associated with TNCO and their increased cooperation with Trans-National Terrorists Organizations (TNTO) posse a strategic threat to the United States. These criminal and terrorist organizations mutually benefit from operating together and purposefully destabilize regions in order to achieve political or monetary gain. TNCOs and TNTOs commonly operate out of regions of the world where permissive borders exist and safe havens can be established. The recent historical examples of the border regions of Colombia and Afghanistan demonstrate the propensity for violence to spread when permissive borders and illicit networks exist and illicit corridors are used to traffic illegal goods.

**Illicit networks spread violence as a result of permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks.**

Many regions around the world have experienced similar conditions, where these factors were present, and violence spread as a result. The conditions experienced along the Colombia/Peru border during the 1980’s and along the Afghanistan/Pakistan border since 2003 reflect many of the same challenges currently being experienced along the U.S South Western border. In each case lawlessness and corruption created permissive spaces. These permissive spaces were created by and sustained through violence and served as the foundation for illicit corridors. Similarities in permissive borders, corruption, lack of governance, and lack of economic opportunities were contributing factors to the creation and maintenance of illicit corridors that spread violence. Narco- trafficking, weapons smuggling, and human trafficking operations were conducted by illicit organizations where illicit corridors were present. In each case examined, where illicit corridors were present these sub-elements existed.

Furthermore the illicit corridors were created and enabled as a result of a lack of governance in the area and were facilitated by corrupt governments that profited from their existence. Although human and weapons trafficking were never the sole purposes of the illicit corridors these activities facilitated narco-trafficking and provided key elements that fueled the transmission of violence.

## ***Method***

What explains how violence spreads from one country to another? Is it a result of permissive borders, illicit corridors, interconnected economic networks, a combination of all three, or something else? To explore the relationship between how violence spreads and the function permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks contribute to the spread of violence this study will draw on case studies of countries that experienced a rise in border related violence. In initial research several countries with recent U.S. involvement came to the forefront. In order to develop the logic of measurement that can be used to evaluate the transmission of violence the border regions along the Colombia/Peru border and the Afghanistan/ Pakistan border were selected.

These cases were selected based on the similar characteristics shared with the U.S. Southwestern border. Both cases illustrate how illicit corridors enabled by porous borders are used to smuggle narcotics, weapons, and humans creating illicit interconnected economic networks. The case studies will be evaluated and analyzed using the Mills Method of agreement.

By using the *Mills Method of Direct Agreement* research pointing towards a better explanation can be developed. The *Mills Method of Direct Agreement* states, "If two or more instances of the phenomenon under investigation have only one circumstance in common, the circumstance in which alone all the instances agree, is the cause (or affect) of the given phenomenon."<sup>5</sup> By utilizing this method a model can be constructed that demonstrates the relationship permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks contribute to the spread of violence. This model can then be used to

formulate an explanation that accounts for the spread of violence and the role these factors contribute to it. This explanation can later be used in the creation of a strategy to contain the spread of violence across the border from Mexico into the United States focusing on the factors that cause it to spread.

There are many explanations currently used to account for the transmission of violence. In many case studies acts of violence are referred to as acts of terrorism as a result of the act being associated with a desired outcome. When separating violence from terrorism the preponderance of explanations and theories can be tied back to a study conducted by Manus I. Midlarsky titled *Why Violence Spreads*. The study concluded the explanation for the rise of violence includes social, economic, or ethnic grievances as a result of government repression or injustice.”<sup>6</sup> The U.S. government has made significant attempts to address the violence occurring in Mexico and counter the spread of violence into the United States with arguable results.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) states their strategic course to strengthen security along the southwestern border has been successful. By deploying increased border patrol agents and employing state of the art technology in conjunction with joint operations with Mexican forces the Department of Homeland Security claims their recent operations have resulted in increased seizures in drugs and weapons. However, the current strategy being used by the DHS does not address the violence Northern Mexico has experienced or the factors that created it and continue to perpetuate it.

If the formulated model developed during this study is proven false and it is determined other factors contribute to the spread of violence, and that permissive borders, illicit corridors and interconnected economic networks do not spread violence these factors can be rejected. By rejecting these factors researchers will be closer to determining the elements that contribute to the spread of violence and explaining this phenomenon. By identifying what causes violence to spread a U.S. strategy can be realized and implemented.

Many connections can be made that directly correlate to the United States and the potential for violence to spread from Mexico into the United States. The spread of violence as a result of permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks is intertwined with many other social factors and creates a complex system with interlinking variables. In his book *Mexico Narco-Violence and a Failed State?* author George W. Grayson stated,

“Middle East Scholar, James Bill, analogies Mexico’s drug world to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Iraq. Political parties and their armies may dominate the headlines, a closer look, however, finds religious, ethnic, and linguistic factions suffusing these organizations. Then there are regional and sub- regional groupings within which exists tribes and warlords, who may or may not speak for extended families that have their own agendas.”<sup>7</sup>

The complexity surrounding the factors that contribute to the spread of violence resulted in a need to better understand the issues. As a result key terms and assumptions were studied that helped determine how the problem should be framed, and as a result how the problem can be addressed. The key terms and concepts associated with how violence is transmitted are as follows, and serve a crucial role in our understanding and defining the problem.

## **Literature Review**

By correlating increased violence and how it is transmitted in border areas a link can be made to the violence occurring in Northern Mexico and the potential for its eventual spread into the United States. The focus of this work is to understand how violence spreads from one country to another and in so doing how it can be countered. The overall logic of the literature review was to identify any previous work that had been done concerning illicit corridors and how they transmit violence. The literature review was conducted to identify areas of consensus, areas of disagreement, and gaps that have not been identified in the study of the spread of violence. The literature review specifically focused on understanding the current problem along the U.S. Southwestern border and the correlation permissive borders, illicit

corridors, and interconnected economic networks contribute to violence spill over, in borderlands, conducted by illicit networks. This literature review intends to help frame the problem and put the violence experienced in Mexico into context in order to facilitate accurate comparisons when evaluating factors that contributed to the spread of violence in the case studies of the Afghanistan/Pakistan and Colombia/Peru.

## **Spill Over**

When observing the current situation on the U.S. / Mexico border many trends are apparent. The spread of violence in Northern Mexico and the United States due to law enforcement, rival cartels, and innocent civilians caught in the crossfire is increasing. According to an article written by Bill Conroy dated March 10, 2012 in *The Narcosphere* he said,

“And Mexico, since late 2006, has seen more than 50,000 of its people slaughtered as part of this drug war — escalated by its current president, Felipe Calderon, who, with the assistance of the US government, has declared an all-out war on the “cartels.” The number of US citizens murdered in Mexico since Calderon declared his assault on the cartels has jumped from 35 in 2007 to 120 last year, according to the US State Department — and that count includes only murders reported to the US government. The number of people murdered in the drug war inside the United States between 2006 and 2010 exceeds the US-troop death toll in the Iraq War since it was launched in 2003, according to a Narco News analysis of FBI crime statistics. The US drug-war homicide tally also is nearly three times greater than the number of US soldiers killed in Afghanistan since the first shots were fired in that war in 2001, the Narco News analysis shows. And that US drug-war murder total — nearly 5,700 people cut down on US soil over the 5-year period — very likely undercounts significantly the extent of the bloodshed.”<sup>8</sup>

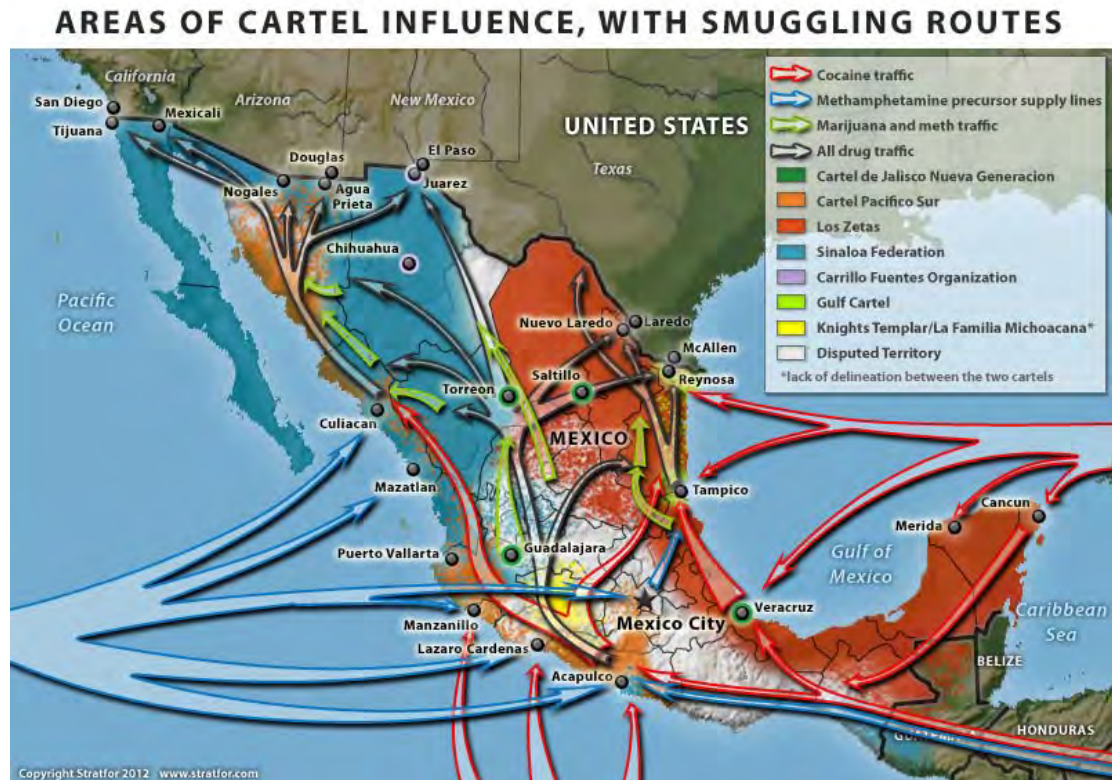
The bloodshed and murder within the United States are acts of violence conducted by transnational criminal organizations to send a message and achieve a desired response.

Violence is a tool used by illicit networks with exceptional brutality, and in varying ways, to accomplish different objectives. In *The Diplomacy of Violence*, Thomas C. Schelling states, “The fact

that violence-pure pain and damage-can be used or threatened to coerce and to deter, to intimidate and to blackmail, to demoralize and to paralyze, in a conscious process of dirty bargaining, does not by any means imply that violence is not often wanton and meaningless or, even when purposive, in danger of getting out of hand.”<sup>15</sup> The ability to hurt and destroy can in most cases, once the legitimacy and will to use violence has been established, be as effective as the actual act itself. Once the act of violence, and propensity to conduct the egregious act, is established the threat of conducting these acts is an effective tool in coercion. This diplomacy of force is effective when the prospect of violence bends the enemy’s will in order to avoid the horrific consequences and is a favorite tactic of narco-traffickers around the globe.

In the book *Weak Links* narco -trafficking was a major contributing factor to violence spill over and was the foundation for illicit corridors due to profits associated with their transportation. Similarities in permissive borders, corruption, lack of governance, and lack of economic opportunities were all contributing factors to the creation and maintenance of illicit corridors. The book was based on historical examples supported by empirical evidence and displayed the direct reliance narco-traffickers have on illicit corridors.

Illicit corridors are lines of communication used to smuggle and transport illegal goods. Illicit corridors are various paths generally associated with, or connecting to, major highways and interstates. These highways serve as a means to transport illicit goods into, out of, and across borders. Illicit corridors are utilized by transnational criminal organizations and are vital to their drug distribution efforts. “Cartels now dominate the U.S. illicit drug market, according to reports by the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC). It found that Mexican crime organizations use their well-established routes to transport cocaine, marijuana, methamphetamine, and heroin ....throughout the country.”<sup>10</sup> The cartels reliance on routes to conduct operations result in violent acts to protect them from legitimate and illegitimate threats.

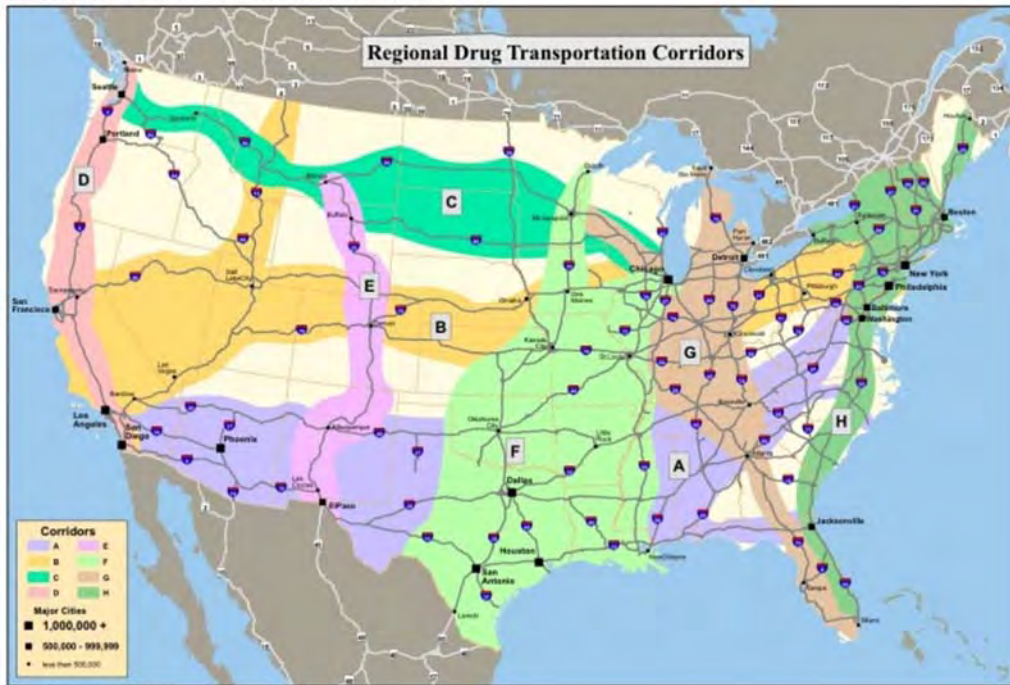


(figure 1)

The routes that are used to smuggle illicit goods form corridors. According to Stewart Patrick corridors are typically established where terrain is advantageous to smugglers, in geographic convenience to distribution centers and exploitable infrastructure, and located in easy access to global markets facilitating transnational crime. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime states, “For the North American market, cocaine is typically transported from Colombia to Mexico or Central America by sea and then onwards by land to the United States and Canada. The US authorities estimate that close to 90% of the cocaine entering the country crosses the US/Mexico land border, most of it entering the state of Texas.”<sup>11</sup> As a result illicit corridors spread violence across international borders, and also serve as a means of travel for illegal immigrants.

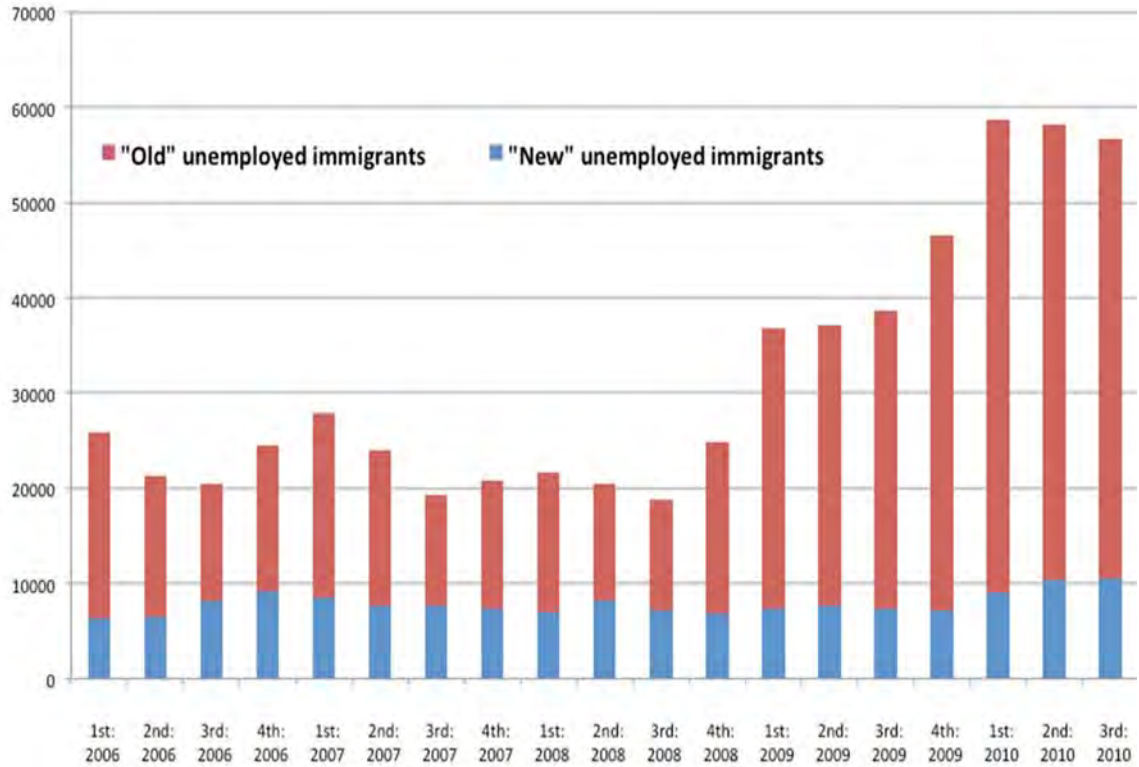


Figure 3. Drug Transportation Corridors in the United States



(figure 2)

Illegal immigrants utilize illicit corridors to cross international borders as a result of permissive borders and lack of governance capitalizing on the permissive space created. Globally illegal immigrants utilizing corridors to travel can be characterized as refugees fleeing violence or economic hardships, and are form of spill over. In the book *Weak Links* immigration as a result of violence and poor economic conditions Mexico has experienced was reviewed. The book concluded the increased immigration from Mexico into the United States was a result of violence and poor economic conditions created from instability. “These two factors contribute to the political immigration issues the United States currently faces, and will ultimately determine how the United States will address the transmission of violence across its borders.”<sup>12</sup> Immigration is closely interrelated to economics and the stability associated with a strong economy. As a result a poor economy was caused by instability that was created by violence and lead to the spill over.



(table 1)

The destabilizing affects of spill over as a result of the use of violence can be measured in death counts, immigrations, and negative economic indicators. Violence spill over and its cascading affects contribute to relatively stable countries experiencing an increase in violence created by unstable countries who perpetuate cycles of conflict as a result of a lack of economic opportunities and poverty. Illicit networks often perpetuate the instability caused by conflict in order to achieve political goals, profit, and in some cases both.

## Illicit Networks

What illicit networks are, how they are developed, and their relationship to international affairs was characterized in an article by Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni titled *Assessing the Dangers of Illicit Networks: Why al-Qaida May Be Less Dangerous Than Many Think*. In the article she explored how technologies are enabling transnational criminal organizations and terrorists organizations to work together in a mutually supporting effort. She stated, “The globalization of transportation, communication, and finance

that has benefited not only licit businesses but also professional criminals and terrorists. Arms dealers, drug traffickers, money launderers, human traffickers, terrorists, and other sundry criminals, enabled by new, affordable technologies, are increasingly organizing into sprawling global networks.”<sup>13</sup> These illicit criminal organizations spread violence to sustain and protect their operations.

Illicit criminal organizations that conduct illegal activities in multiple jurisdictions are referred to as Trans-National Criminal Organizations (TNCO). TNCOs rely heavily on trading narcotics, weapons, and humans for profit. The H.R. 3401 defines Transnational Criminal Organizations as, “self-perpetuating associations who operate transnationally for the purpose of obtaining power, influence, or monetary gain by illegal means; and protect their activities by utilizing corruption and violence.”<sup>14</sup> The TNCOs in Mexico, commonly referred to as Cartels, are responsible for the violence experienced in Mexico and along the U.S. Southwestern border.

As a result of cartels being highly adaptive and working across several jurisdictions focused efforts to arrest their leadership has been problematic. According to Stewart Patrick,

“Transnational criminals engage in transnational crime but do not have a unified transnational criminal movement. However, like terrorists transnational criminals are shifting from traditional hierarchical organizations to more adaptable, decentralized networks involving strategic partnerships among smaller groups dispersed across many countries.”<sup>15</sup>

There are currently seven major cartels battling for control of the corridors and with it the distribution opportunities they control in the United States. The Tijuana Cartel, Federation Cartel, Gulf Cartel, Juarez Cartel, Sinaloa Cartel, Knights Templar Cartel, and Los Zetas Cartel organizations are the current major illicit networks threatening the United States and transmitting violence into America. In his book *Weak Links* Stewart Patrick stated, “The cross-border trade in narcotics has the devastating direct impact causing an estimated 17,000 drug related deaths in the U.S. each year and costing \$180.9 billion annually, including health care costs and productivity losses.”<sup>16</sup> The transnational criminal’s organizations in Mexico have been effective as a result of utilizing organizational structures and tactics similar to terrorists’ organizations.



(figure 1)

The relationship between violence and terrorism is close, and the use of violence by cartels in many ways resembles how terrorist use violence. Terrorists use violence and the threat of violence to achieve recognition of a cause. Terrorism is defined by The National Counterterrorism Center of the United States as a “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets by subnational groups or clandestine agents.” The acts of violence in Mexico have been referred to by the U.S. Congress as acts of terrorism, and the time frame they have been committed an insurgency. The Enhanced Border Security Act ( HR 3401) classified the actions occurring along the U.S. Southwestern border as a Terrorist Insurgency and defined it as, “the protracted use of irregular warfare, including extreme displays of public violence utilized by transnational criminal organizations to influence public opinion and to undermine government control and rule of law in order to increase the control and influence of the organizations.”<sup>17</sup> The transnational criminal organizations who conduct the extreme displays of violence also cooperate with Transnational terrorist organizations for mutual economic profit and create illicit economic opportunities where they are present.

The interconnected illicit economic networks associated with TNCO and terrorist organizations serve as a mechanism for the organizations to generate revenue. These interconnected illicit activities vary in complexity and severity, are diverse, and highly profitable.

“Illegal drugs are one example of a larger class of illicit goods, services, and economic activities. Other illegal or semi illegal commodities include conflict diamonds, special minerals, weapons, alcohol, wildlife, human beings, human organs, toxic and industrial waste, and components of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons....Illegal, or semi illegal, activities including gambling, prostitution, illicit trade in legal goods, document forging, piracy and maritime fraud. Illicit economies thus encompass economic commodities, services, and transactions, the production or provision of which is completely prohibited or partially proscribed.”<sup>18</sup>

The associated perpetrators of the previously mentioned crimes commit acts of violence to establish and protect illicit economic activities. They also spread violence by creating opportunities for non- members to profit from committing acts of violence.

Illicit economic networks spread violence as a result of unbalancing the pre-existing opportunity cost to commit violence. By increasing the flow of weapons and wealth into an area the cost associated with committing a violent act is lowered and opportunities are created. Therefore the act of violence becomes an opportunity for profit, with less risk associated with it, which did not previously exist. Violence in border regions may occur as a result of unbalancing initially caused by unbalancing created by illicit economic networks and further perpetuated by an increase in competition to control the networks conducting the illicit acts.

When competition is increased as a result of the loss of leadership due to violence the increased competition creates conditions for more bloodshed to occur. This phenomenon is best illustrated by the King Pin Theory. In an article published in the Economist October 19, 2012 titled *Kingpin Bowling* the author stated, “Despite it all, the murder rate is nearly twice as high as it was when Mr. Calderón took office six years ago. In some cases the capture of kingpins has led to feuds among their deputies, fuelling the violence.”<sup>19</sup> By eliminating leaders voids are created and accelerate the rate in which violent acts are committed. As a result more violence and the loss of stability are experienced. The loss of leadership

perpetuates the cycle of violence as more competition is created to fill the void of the previous leader of the illicit network. This increase in violent activity destabilizes the illicit network and negatively impact the economy built around it. The resulting destabilizing affect negatively impacts a region and creates geographical locations where more violent acts tend to occur, further perpetuating violence in border land areas.

## **Border Lands**

The spread of violence across borders is not a new problem, and is a well-researched and documented phenomenon. It has occurred ever since civilizations created boundaries to mark the legitimate use of power in relationship to territory. These borders most often were placed in relationship to terrain, cultural divides, or other significant recognized boundaries with the intent to indicate the ruling body of power's authority and to minimize violence to the citizens of that state. Borders were originally devised to protect territory and citizens in order to mitigate violence, but in practice rarely accomplished this.

In order to understand how violence can be transmitted an understanding of borders is required. In his work *Rebels With-Out Borders* author Idean Salehyan defined borders as, "International institutions, the primary function of international boundaries is to demarcate legal or de facto lines of military control and political jurisdiction."<sup>20</sup> Where these boundaries exist, clashes of cultural and social interactions occur as well.

There is a well-documented relationship between borderlands and violence caused by dynamic social interaction. Editor William Zartman in his book, *Understanding Life in the Borderlands Boundaries in Depth and in Motion*, compiled essays from 11 of the world's foremost experts on international boundaries and clearly illustrated the consensus of the contributing authors, that borders are regions that are intertwined culturally and economically that heavily rely on policies and future policies to exist. "Ultimately borderlands, of all countries, have dynamic social spheres that are impacted by life on

borders and that they have always dealt with and anticipated policy changes.”<sup>21</sup> The authors further examined how borders have their own dynamics and spread beyond the fringes deep into the heartlands of the states they serve. To the extent travel across borders is unregulated, and governments are unable to control the activities across the border, a permissive border exists.

A permissive border enables illicit corridors and illicit economic activities to occur. A permissive border is characterized as a border that is not controlled by the legitimate government of a country as a result of a lack of resources, corruption, or desire. In a recent study the U.S. Southwestern border was characterized as permissive.

“A report by the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) stated, more than 93% of the American-Mexican border remains porous by DHS’s own standards. The American Independent’s Kyle Daly reports: Of the 1,969 miles of the border stretching from California to Texas, just 873 miles are deemed secure, according to the standards of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Within those 873, only 129 miles were classified in the GAO report as “controlled,” meaning there are resources in place to either turn away or apprehend people attempting to cross into the United States illegally.”<sup>22</sup>

Permissive borders facilitate illicit corridors and the associated illicit economic networks that utilize them to conduct business. Borderlands are present where ever two separate governed spaces meet, how they are controlled dictates the fate of that region.

Borderlands are complex areas where different cultures come together, social interactions occur, economic trade is conducted, and legitimate use of force is delineated. When borderlands are not governed rule of law is not present and permissive areas are created that illicit networks can operate in. These permissive areas serve as safe havens and are created, and perpetuated, by acts of violence. The case studies illustrate these permissive spaces and the factors that created them.

## Case Studies

After conducting the literature review a better understanding of the problems associated with the U.S. Southwestern border was attained. By examining what spill over is and its relationship to borderlands and illicit networks the expected value correlating their existence to the spread of violence can be made. In order for these factors to spread violence the elements of permissive borders, illicit corridors, and illicit economic networks must be present. If these elements are present the spread of violence will occur. There is a direct correlation between violence and the common patterns associated with violence spill over. As a result the case studies of the Afghanistan/Pakistan border and the Colombia/Peru border need to illustrate the correlation between illicit networks spreading violence in regions enabled by permissive borders, illicit corridors, and illicit economic networks. By illustrating that these factors caused violence to spread a logical prediction can be made that violence will spread from Mexico into the United States.

By looking at similar border regions the relationships between permissive borders, illicit corridors, and illicit interconnected economic networks can be evaluated. In analyzing these case studies the relationship between these elements can be linked to higher levels of violence and a spillover affect. This spill over affect can be characterized as violence conducted by illicit networks in one state spreading into another state along illicit corridors. To the extent this relationship is a general pattern points to future challenges likely to confront the United States.



## Afghanistan/Pakistan



(figure 5)

Afghanistan is a country long known for violence. Located in South Asia and bordered by Iran to the west and Pakistan to the south east Afghanistan has been a source of instability and war since gaining independence from Great Britain in 1919. The Islamic Republic of Afghanistan's lack of governance has enabled violence to spread into the Islamic Republic of Pakistan as a result of porous borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks that allow Taliban insurgents safe havens to conduct operations from.

### Porous Borders

Today the borderland region of Pakistan and Afghanistan serves as a safe haven for Taliban insurgents fighting to overthrow the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. "The Taliban (plural of Talib, a student) were the products of madrassas that had mushroomed in the tribal areas and refugee camps in Pakistan and Afghanistan, especially after the exit of Soviet troops. The Afghan Jihad had provided the environment for the growth of madrassas in Pakistan's tribal areas adjoining Afghanistan."<sup>23</sup> The porous borders separating Pakistan from Afghanistan shaped the region and created safe havens. These porous borders also facilitated illicit corridors that were used to transport illicit goods that sustain the insurgency. Today this borderland is utilized by the Taliban and is vital in their efforts.

The borderlands of Afghanistan and Pakistan are separated by harsh terrain. The severe Hindu Kush Mountain Range and Dashti Margo Desert divide the two countries. The Hindu Kush mountain range located in the North divides the basins of the Helmand and Kabul Rivers from the Amu River, while the Dashti Margo Desert (translated Desert of Death) is located in the Southern provinces of Helmand and Nimruz. Historically these border regions have served as a natural barrier to invading armies and a place of refuge for fighters seeking protection. The terrain makes travel between the countries difficult and canalizes movement into mobility corridors. As a result of the harsh terrain and a lack of resources efforts to secure the border have been limited and ineffective. The resulting permissive border allows illicit networks to move relatively unimpeded between the two countries and fuels an illicit economy.

In an article written for the Council on Foreign Relations the porous border of Afghanistan contributed too much of the violence and problems occurring in the region.

“Both the Pashtuns and Balochis gain much of their income from cross-border smuggling, says the USIP paper. Thanks to the largely porous border and people from similar ethnic groups straddling both its sides, “the borderlands already have become a land bridge for the criminal (drugs) and criminalized (transit trade) economies of the region.” The transborder political and military networks between the two countries are reinforced as well as funded and armed by criminal activities such as trafficking in drugs, arms, and even people.”<sup>24</sup>

The porous border facilitates illicit networks to smuggle illegal goods. By smuggling narcotics, weapons, and humans, illicit networks such as the Taliban are able to generate profits to continue their insurgency. As a result the illicit corridors that provide mobility across the harsh terrain and link Afghanistan’s illicit markets to Pakistan’s illicit markets are of strategic importance to the Taliban.

### **Illicit Corridors**

The illicit corridors utilized by the Taliban transport needed equipment, personnel, and supplies. However, of all requirements most vital to sustaining their insurgency narcotics, and the funding it

produces, is most vital. In order to transport narcotics to markets for sale illicit corridors are required to ship the drugs and are essential dictating Taliban strategy.

“Deh Rawood is perched along the most important drugs- and arms-trafficking route in Uruzgan, connecting to Iran in the west and Pakistan in the south. The shift in battlefield tactics is a strong indication Taliban leaders work closely with traffickers, who appear to have tremendous decision-making influence over their strategic activities. This transformation in their battlefield tactics—from trying to make tactical gains to protecting drug shipments—mirrors similar behavior by insurgent groups around the globe. Many Taliban are no longer fighting for Allah but for the almighty dollar.”<sup>25</sup>

The revenue generation of narcotics, and the strategic importance illicit corridors represent to the Taliban illustrates the extreme economic hardships of the borderlands and the importance illicit economic networks have in the region.



(figure 4)

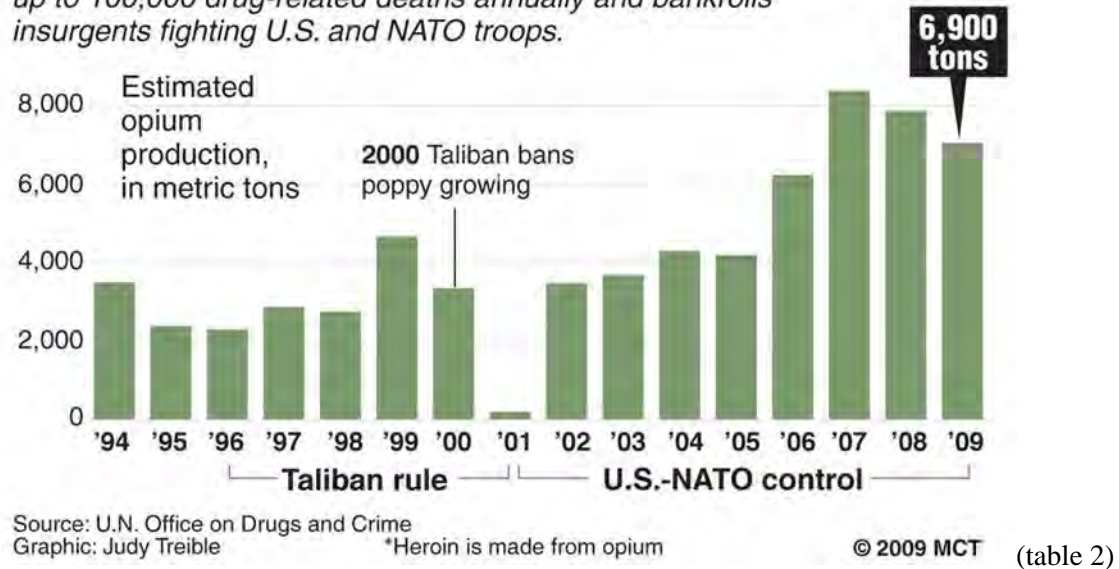
## Illicit Economic Networks

Afghanistan's economy has suffered, and ranks among the poorest in the world, as a result of decades of war. The land locked country has experienced a decline in productivity in agriculture and service sectors due to instability created by conflict. Afghanistan currently relies heavily on foreign aid, and despite \$67 billion dollars of donations intended to spur economic growth, remains one of the most poverty stricken countries in the world.<sup>26</sup> There are many contributing factors to Afghanistan's economic hardships, according to the CIA world fact book, "Criminality, insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure, and the Afghan Government's difficulty in extending rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth."<sup>27</sup> With such a dismal economy illicit economic networks have flourished.

The illicit interconnected economic networks of Afghanistan and Pakistan have prospered as a result of the economic hardships the region has suffered. Illicit goods, especially narcotics, are the major revenue producers in the area. According to Gretchen Peters in an article titled *How Opium Profits the Taliban* she stated, " Added together, drug-related profits earned by the Taliban and other extremist groups operating along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border could total as much as a half a billion dollars per year."<sup>28</sup> Since narcotics are a key source of revenue for the Taliban as combat operations against them increased so too did the level of opium production in the Afghanistan /Pakistan border region. In the same article Gretchen Peters stated, " Not only have narcotics corrupted the Afghan government, they have also begun to transform—through deepening ties between insurgents and drug traffickers along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border—the nature of the insurgency from one based on ideology to one increasingly driven by profit. Insurgent commanders from the district level up to the top leadership have expanded their involvement vertically through the drug trade."<sup>29</sup> In the corresponding graph from the U.N. Office of Drugs and Crime the steady increase in Taliban controlled opium production is depicted. This opium, later transformed into heroin, finances the Taliban insurgency efforts. As the production of opium has increased so too has the violence, which has begun to spill over into Pakistan.

# Afghanistan's deadly crop

*Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the world's opium\*. The drug causes up to 100,000 drug-related deaths annually and bankrolls insurgents fighting U.S. and NATO troops.*



## Violence Spill Over

The conflict, initially confined to Afghanistan has begun to spill over into Pakistan. The current war which was fueled by Taliban support of Al Qaeda, and U.S. retaliation in response to the terrorist attacks on 9/11 has continually evolved. With sustained pressure and heavy losses Taliban leadership has sought refuge in the tribal areas located in Pakistan. Utilizing the porous border and illicit corridors the Taliban currently utilize the borderlands to conduct operations. “From their bases in Pakistan, the Taliban launched attacks into Afghanistan while recruiting Pakistani Pashtuns to provide them with base security and additional manpower, even as they radicalized them for their cause.”<sup>30</sup> The interconnected dynamic of the Taliban insurgency and narcotics trade, fueled by porous borders, and illicit corridors illustrates how violence spreads.

Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan 2003-2013				
	Civilians	Security Force Personnel	Terrorists/Insurgents	Total
2003	140	24	25	189
2004	435	184	244	863
2005	430	81	137	648
2006	608	325	538	1471
2007	1522	597	1479	3598
2008	2155	654	3906	6715
2009	2324	991	8389	11704
2010	1796	469	5170	7435
2011	2738	765	2800	6303
2012	3007	732	2472	6211
2013	251	33	100	384
<b>Total*</b>	<b>15406</b>	<b>4855</b>	<b>25260</b>	<b>45521</b>

\*Data till January 13, 2013

(table 3)

The case study of the Afghanistan and Pakistan border region demonstrates how violence spills over and spreads between countries. The increase in violence can be linked to illicit corridors, facilitated by porous borders, used to smuggle opium out of Afghanistan - and weapons and fighters back. Over a ten year period the violence has dramatically increased in Pakistan and has continually gotten worse despite International Security Force efforts to mitigate it. However, the efforts to address spillover have largely focused on interdicting illicit corridors and have not addressed the porous border or economic opportunities required to combat the illicit economy sustaining the insurgency and spreading violence. Author Gretchen Peters stated,

“A successful policy in Afghanistan would not prioritize but would mount a multipronged attack, combining intensive diplomacy; a reshaped military and intelligence strategy; police, judicial, and economic reform; and targeted development programs. Instead of *nation building*, this problem requires *region building*.”<sup>31</sup>



The situation in Afghanistan closely resembles the drug war in Mexico. The countries have distinct similarities that have enabled illicit networks to conduct operations and spread violence. The porous borders of the Hindu Kush Mountain Range, and Dashti Margo Desert, bare striking resemblance to the topography of the U.S. Southwestern border and share many similarities. The porous borders associated with these regions enabled by lack of governance create illicit corridors used to smuggle goods and connect illicit economic networks. These illicit economic activities sustain illicit networks that profit from transporting narcotics, weapons, and humans and conduct acts of violence to establish, and protect, corridors and safe havens required to sustain the cycle.

## **COLOMBIA/PERU**



(figure6)

The case study focusing on Peru and Colombia in the 1980s illustrates many similarities to the current situation occurring along the U.S. Southwestern border and demonstrates how violence spreads. During the 1980s the Colombian Cartels operated with relative impunity in South America and spread their cocaine growing efforts into Peru. The purpose of shifting production efforts from Colombia into Peru was in large part to avoid increased U.S. drug eradication efforts, avoid fungal blight that threatened cocaine production, and capitalize on the increased yield rates Peruvian soil offered. The influence of illicit networks operating in Colombia during the 1980's was enabled by porous borders and illicit corridors that increased illicit economies, fed corruption, and spread violence into Peru creating an

economy that continues to be dependent on cocaine production despite decades of effort to reverse the cycle.

## **Porous Borders**

The porous borders of Peru and Colombia were, and continue to be, characterized by harsh terrain covered by triple canopy jungle. The porous border has always been an issue shared by the two countries, but until recently very little research had been conducted to measure the degree in which people, and goods, could transit unimpeded. In a study conducted by Latin News Intelligence Research focusing on statistics, and the Colombian Police report titled *Criminalidad*, facts concerning the Colombian border were analyzed. In an article titled *Colombia; Where 'Spillover' is Already a Fact* the porous border separating Peru and Colombia was described as, “the extent to which Colombia's porous borders are conduits for drugs, arms, stolen cars and kidnap victims - puts much of the blame on its neighbours..... Frequent features of the southern border with Peru (1,626km) are the felling of forests for drug crops and labs, the capture of wild animals for sale to Brazilian traffickers, auto theft, and uncontrolled movement of Colombian armed groups -- apart from drug trafficking and gunrunning.”<sup>32</sup> As a result of the porous borders, which have always occurred in the region, illicit corridors enable smuggling activities with little interference from legitimate government.

## **Illicit Corridors**

Due to the dense jungle many illicit corridors comprised of small roads, rivers, and air ways linking one small run way to another cover the jungle. These small, multiple, complex corridors link the two bordering countries together and creates virtual bridges to smuggle illicit goods across. The illicit corridors that link the countries together were described by the Colombian government as, “an important bridge for the organisations engaged in drug trafficking, gunrunning, smuggling and crimes against the environment.”<sup>33</sup> These illicit corridors are enabled by the porous borders of the region and are vital to the operations of illicit networks operating in the region.



There were two major types of illicit networks operating in Colombia during the 1980s, cartels and terrorist. The two major cartel organizations operating in Colombia during the 1980's were the Medellin and Cali Cartels. The cartels exploited the lack of governance and poor economic conditions that plagued Peru during this time frame and created coca processing laboratories to meet the growing global demand for cocaine. It was during this period Peru's illicit networks began to export cocaine out of the country, and weapons and money back into the country. An illicit economy was formed that supported the cartel operations and generated profits. In need of funding and in collaboration with the cartels the terrorist organizations became involved in the illicit economy. One of these terrorist organizations was the Sendero Luminoso (the Shining Path).

The Sendero Luminoso was founded by Abimael Guzman in the late 1960's. The Maoist guerilla insurgent organization sought to instill a communist government in Peru and began their guerrilla war in 1980. By 1983 the underfunded, ill equipped, and under manned guerilla organization sought refuge in the Upper Hualaga Valley (UHV) of Peru. The UHV is a fertile valley with limited access into and out of, and is surrounded by impenetrable triple canopy Amazon jungle. Here the Sendero Luminoso became involved in the illicit economy of the region. In the book *More Terrible Than Death; Massacres, Drugs, and America's War in Colombia* author Robin Kirk stated, "Seriously weakened and on the run, the shining Path was forced to open a new front in the Upper Huallaga Valley (UHV), a remote and inaccessible region that was ideally suited for guerrilla warfare. That area also happened to be the main coca producing region in Peru. By the mid 1980's the Peruvian drug trade was believed to generate global revenues of more than \$24 billion dollars. "<sup>34</sup> The Sendero Luminoso profited greatly and used their profits to conduct operations targeted against the Government of Peru and to protect their illicit economy, increasing the size of their force and their illicit activities.

The Sendero Luminoso quickly learned the workings of the illicit economy and soon diversified into cocaine production and other forms of participation. "By 1986, the Shining Path had consolidated its control of the UHV, where coca cultivation reached 107,500 hectares that year. It also learned how to

exploit coca production for its own ends. Their first step was to levy a 5% tax on sales of coca paste exported to Colombia, thereby generating \$30 million a year. Later Sendero began to charge traffickers a fee to protect their coca processing facilities and cocaine labs and facilitation fee, raising another \$75 million dollars a year.”<sup>35</sup> Sendero Luminoso generated huge profits from illicit activities and grew their insurgency. “The morass in Peru only worsened, as Shining Path continued to make inroads, the economy disintegrated and the destabilizing affect of the cocaine trade became more and more acute.”<sup>36</sup> The more revenue that was generated allowed the Sendero Luminoso the ability to infiltrate, and influence, the government of Peru through bribes and corruption.

As a result of the high cocaine production rates of the UHV and the resulting increased funding generated by these activities the Sendero Luminoso became more powerful and exerted more control over the area through corruption. Local leaders, government officials, Peruvian Army Officers, and Peruvian counter narcotics agents were all on Sendero’s pay roll. “Despite the war on drugs, coca production was not leveling off, Maoist Shining Path guerrillas were extending control over the Upper Huallaga Valley and corrupt Peruvian Army elements increasingly thwarted us and corruption was creeping into the ranks of the Peruvian drug police, the main U.S. ally in the drug war.”<sup>37</sup> Government corruption in the region continued at a staggering rate.

Alarmed at the rate of corruption occurring in Peru and Colombia, the negative affects of cocaine in the U.S., and the ability of a communist insurgency in South America to fund itself, the United States intensified its efforts to counter the illicit networks. “In 1986 President Ronald Regan signed security Directive No. 221, which declared drugs a national security threat. What began to be called “the war on drugs” was focused on the source countries, among them Peru (where the coca was grown) and Colombia (where criminal syndicates refined, packaged, and sent the cocaine north).”<sup>38</sup> The transportation of the coca from Peru into Colombia was made possible by the porous border and illicit corridors that connected the two countries, and was enabled by government corruption. Cocaine was smuggled into Colombia and

money and weapons were smuggled back into Peru. This cycle destabilized the region and spread violence.

As a result of illicit networks funded by narcotics the region was destabilized in the mid 1980's and conditions were set that spread violence from Colombia into Peru. The weapons and personnel flowing freely between the two countries, and an ever growing safe haven created by violence defeated rule of law and legitimate commerce migrated toward security. The lack of rule of law transmitted violence across Peru and was perpetuated by criminal and terrorist organizations for profit and political ideology. As anti-narcotic operations increased in Colombia, drug production increased in Peru facilitated by permissive spaces and illicit economic networks.

As coca production in Peru increased so did the violence. Violence spread from Colombia fueled by illicit economies and corruption. In an article in the magazine *River of Life, A Missionary Journal* from Peru titled *Peru is at War with Narco-Terrorists, Narco-Traffickers* the affects of violence in Peru during this time frame was illustrated,

“Following the collapse of the Fujimori government, the caretaker government of Valentin Paniagua approved the establishment of a "truth and reconciliation commission," which was inaugurated on July 13, 2001. The commission investigated the abuses that took place in the 1980's and 1990's during Peru's struggle with two terrorist organizations—The Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) and the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). The final report issued on 28 August 2003 drew the following conclusions: Based on statistical analysis, the commission's final report estimated that the total number of people who died during the conflict period is between 61,007 and 77,552, in addition to hundreds of thousands of displaced persons.”<sup>39</sup>

The alarming death rate in Peru during the 1980s and the contributing factors that created it illustrate how violence spreads and the devastating affects it had on the region.

With U.S. pressure resulting in increased eradication efforts, support of the Peruvian Government, and paramilitary organizations fighting the illicit networks, the narco- industry in Peru suffered. With the capture of a number of high ranking illicit officials and the loss of local support, the success the illicit networks experienced in Peru dwindled. Despite this success Peru still continues to

struggle with high amounts of cocaine production. As a result of the illicit economy created in the 1980s and a lack of viable economic alternatives Peru continues to lead the world in cocaine production.

In the last ten years the drug production in Peru has steadily increased while cocaine production in Colombia has steadily declined, as illustrated in table 4. In a NBC report published July 31, 2012 NBC News staff and wire reported, “Peru has again become the top producer of pure cocaine in the world, outpacing Colombia, where output fell by an estimated 25 percent in a year, according to a White House report issued Monday.” Without economic alternatives Peru will continue to produce the majority of the world’s cocaine and create safe havens for illicit networks that will repeat the cycle and again spread violence across the region.

<b>Table 12.</b>	<b>Global illicit cultivation of coca bush, 2001-2010 (Hectares)</b>									
	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	19 900	21 600	23 600	27 700	25 400	27 500	28 900	30 500	30 900	31 000
Colombia										
(Area without adjustment for small fields)	144 800	102 000	86 000	80 000	86 000	78 000	99 000	81 000	68 000	57 000
(Area with adjustment for small fields)	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	73 000	62 000
Peru	46 200	46 700	44 200	50 300	48 200	51 400	53 700	56 100	59 900	61 200
<b>Total<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>210 900</b>	<b>170 300</b>	<b>153 800</b>	<b>158 000</b>	<b>159 600</b>	<b>156 900</b>	<b>181 600</b>	<b>167 600</b>	<b>158 800</b>	<b>149 200</b>

(table 4)

The Colombia/Peru case study of the 1980’s illustrates many similarities presently occurring in Mexico and the possibility of the violence spreading into the United States if left unchecked. As a result of illicit networks operating in an area, an illicit economy prospered. The illicit economy trafficked narcotics across international borders and generated large profits that sustained their operations and allowed them to grow and diversify. Illicit diversification and expansion generated power that fueled government corruption through bribery, and threatened the legitimacy of the governing state. Unchecked the illicit networks conducted brutal acts and spread violence resulting in a staggering death count. After illicit networks were defeated by legitimate forces the illicit economy remained due to a lack of viable

economic alternatives. The case study of Colombia/Peru illustrates how porous borders and illicit corridors sustain illicit economies that corrupt governments and spread violence. The case also demonstrates how important economic alternatives are in creating a long term solution to the problem.

### **Case Study Summary**

By studying how illicit networks located in Afghanistan and Pakistan and Peru and Colombia spread violence, similarities in the factors that enabled the violence to spread can be compared and analyzed. By identifying the key elements that spread violence predictions to the future safety of the U.S. border region can be determined and options to mitigate violence can be explored. Although separated by thousands of miles and significant cultural differences the borderland regions in the case studies illustrate the significance porous borders, illicit corridors, and illicit economies have in funding and sustaining illicit networks that spread violence.

In both cases studies porous borders were present. Although porous borders separate many countries around the globe porous borders enable unimpeded movement of people and goods across internationally recognized borders. Often porous borders are exacerbated by harsh terrain. The Hindu Kush Mountains and Dashti Desert of Afghanistan/Pakistan and the Amazon Jungle of Peru/Colombia illustrate how terrain can affect legitimate governments' ability to interdict movement across borders and interdict illicit corridors.

The illicit corridors in both case studies were used to transport illicit goods across international borders. In both cases the preponderance of illicit goods smuggled were narcotics, weapons, money, and in the Afghanistan/Pakistan case study, humans. Illicit corridors were created along major transportation networks, in relation to terrain, in order to maximize their effectiveness and lessen the risk of interference from legitimate government counter efforts. The illicit corridors of Afghanistan/Pakistan are historic smuggling routes used for centuries and are the significant mobility corridors of the region. These mobility corridors link passes in the mountains regions and water sources in desert regions that enable

travel in the harsh environment. In Peru/Colombia the illicit corridors are a series of rivers, roads, and air bridges that link villages. This transportation network creates mobility corridors in the Amazon. In both cases the illicit corridors utilize harsh terrain, porous borders, and ungoverned spaces to the smugglers advantage allowing the transportation of illicit goods and linking illicit economies.

As a result of porous borders and illicit corridors, illicit economies flourish. The illicit economies in both cases were enabled as a result of a lack of economic opportunities in the regions and an ability to produce and transport illicit goods. The illicit economies created profits and attracted terrorist organizations that worked with criminal networks and maximized the opportunities offered by the permissive environment. These illicit networks conducted acts of violence in order to spread the illicit economy, protect illicit corridors, or perpetuate a political message supported by profits generated by their involvement in the illicit economy. The below graph depicts the key factors of porous borders, illicit corridors, and illicit economies and their relationship to the spread of violence.

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Afghanistan/Pakistan Border</b>	<b>Colombia/ Peru Border</b>	<b>Spillover Inference</b>
<b>Porous Borders</b>	Hindu Kush Mountains Dashti Desert Lack of Resources	Amazon Jungle Lack of Resources	Porous borders enable illicit corridors
<b>Illicit Corridors</b>	Mobility Corridors Historic Smuggling Routes	Rivers, Roads, Air Bridges	Illicit Corridors are vital to illicit economies
<b>Illicit Economy</b>	Afg/Pak Taliban/ Criminals Opium, Weapons, Fighters Money	Cartels/Terrorists/Criminals Cocaine, Weapons, Money	Illicit economies are created by and sustain illicit networks that spread violence in order to create safe havens and protect illicit corridors

(table 5)

## Way Ahead



(figure7)

By establishing the factors that cause violence to spread across borders a national strategy can be formulated that stops its spread. Through focusing on the factors that spread violence; porous borders, illicit corridors, and illicit economies can be targeted and mitigated in order to combat their affects. By combating these factors that spread violence, violence can be contained and the mortality rates that have plagued Mexico can be reduced and prevented from spilling over into the United States. In exploring options, realistic, viable, solutions to the problem does not translate directly into military intervention. Instead the solution relies heavily on the United States' and Mexico's other elements of national power; diplomacy, information, and economics. By utilizing these elements appropriately a long term, sustainable strategy, can be developed and successfully implemented. In order to counter the spread of violence the U.S. and Mexico must focus their combined elements of national power on eliminating the factors that enable illicit networks to conduct operations.

### Diplomatic

In order for this strategy to be effective the full cooperation and support of the Mexican government is necessary. To achieve this required support a concerted diplomatic effort must be the first phase, and

has already occurred. In a diplomatic effort to address the violence occurring in Mexico the U.S. initiated the Merida Initiative in 2008. The Four Pillars of the Merida Initiative according the U.S. State Department are and remain, to: 1) Disrupt Organized Criminal Groups, 2) Strengthen Institutions , 3) Build a 21st Century Border , and 4) Build Strong and Resilient Communities. The diplomatic efforts undertaken by President Bush were increased by President Obama in 2008 despite fiscal restraints in Washington. According to the watch group Witness for Peace, “The Mérida Initiative allocated over \$1.5 billion dollars to Mexico from 2008-2010. U.S. military and police aid in each of these years marked nearly a 10-fold increase over 2007 levels. President Obama and the State Department continue to extend military/police aid to Mexico beyond Mérida’s expiration date, and requested an additional \$310 million for 2011 and \$290 million for 2012.”<sup>40</sup> The diplomatic efforts undertaken by the United States acknowledges the importance a combined partnership between the two countries is in addressing the violence.

The U.S. support for a peaceful resolution to the problems plaguing Mexico was addressed by a statement made by the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton May 3, 2011. “And the United States remains committed to helping the Mexican Government go after the cartels and organized crime and the corruption they generate.... Our goal is ... to provide support and help to enable our Mexican friends and partners to be as successful as they are seeking to be. And we will continue, through the Merida Initiative, to provide significant support.”<sup>41</sup> Diplomatic efforts and funding alone are only one piece of the equation. Information operations and other elements of national power must be coordinated with Mexican efforts to counter the Cartels who spread violence.

## **Information**

The drug cartels quickly adapted to changes in culture and technology and incorporated information operations into every aspect of their organization. According to the book *La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S. Mexican Security*, La Familia came onto the scene in 2006 and harnessed



information operations quickly incorporating it into every facet of their operations from recruitment to kinetic operations. “La Familia recruits out of over a dozen rehabilitation clinics they operate. Once a potential recruit is clean they begin their training. The recruits must submit themselves to 2 months of brain washing that includes scripture readings, exposure to motivational speakers, and long periods of silence and meditation.”<sup>42</sup> La Familia’s information operations were also used to send messages to adversaries and the community they operate in.

“On September 2006, when ruffians crashed into a seedy Sol y Sombra nightclub in Urupan, Miochoacan, and fired shots into the air. They screamed at revelers to lie down , ripped open a plastic bag, and lobbed 5 human heads onto a beer-stained black and white floor.....You don’t do something like that unless you want to send a big message said a U.S. law enforcement official.”<sup>43</sup>



(figure 8)

Cartel leaders in an effort to persuade the local populace in their favor and prevent paramilitary organizations from countering them have also incorporated information operations into a campaign designed to win hearts and minds. Through a series of writings, songs, and videos created to win over the support of the local people the cartels have been successful. “The Cartels leaders have pledged to eradicate from the state of Michoacan kidnapping, extortion in person and by telephone , paid assignation, express kidnapping, tractor-trailer and auto theft, and home robberies done by people like those mentioned, who have made the state an unsafe place.”<sup>44</sup> In efforts to gain and maintain popular support

cartels have made extensive efforts to employ information operations in everything they do, from training, to direct action, to engagement with the population to maintain local support.

For a joint U.S./Mexican strategy to be successful in countering the spread of violence information operations must be heavily weighted. The popular support of the people on both sides of the border must be gained in an effort to identify leadership, production facilities, and illicit corridors. The perception that cartels are protecting local citizens, and providing basic services because the Mexican Government is unable to must be reversed. As illustrated by the case study of Peru, local paramilitary organizations and neighborhood watches must be established that deny safe havens to illicit organizations. The Cartel information operations have been successful and as a result many Mexicans do not want to see the U.S. become involved in, or fund military operations. . “[In 2007 the Mexican] army committed severe human rights violations in their supposed counter-drug operations. We are concerned that the funding from the U.S. government will ultimately make this situation worse.”<sup>45</sup>

Through directly targeting all aspects of Mexican culture and integrating information operations into the overall strategy the joint U.S./Mexican effort can nullify the popular support currently experienced by the cartels in Mexico. By conducting non-kinetic targeting efforts the success the Cartel’s information operations have had can be reversed and the popular support the Cartels currently experience in Mexico can be severely degraded. By establishing conditions of support for further U.S. intervention limited U.S. military operations can be conducted to support training, security, and when required direct action against designated targets.

## **Military**

The United States military will play a vital, yet limited, role in a campaign designed to reestablish the rule of law in the Mexico borderland region. As demonstrated by the case studies the porous border separating the United States and Mexico must be strengthened and a defense in depth type buffer must be established. The current linear static defense employed by the U.S. is costly and ineffective. The U.S.

military has the capacity to secure the porous border, and working in close coordination with interagency organizations, control the illicit corridors.

In order to do this the porous border separating Mexico and the United States must be secured through coordinated Mexican/U.S. efforts of law enforcement and military organizations on both sides of the border. A joint military/ law enforcement task force operating on both sides of the border could effectively control the border and the illicit corridors that currently flourish there. By controlling the illicit corridors the illicit economies that rely on them will be severely degraded. Funding generated by illicit economies connected by illicit corridors will be reduced and illicit networks capabilities will be diminished. By securing the border competition to control illicit corridors between cartels will also be eliminated and curtail the competition generated to control them. Efforts to secure the border will be costly and resource intensive. Controlling the corridors will be paramount to the success of stopping the spread of violence and countering the illicit networks that create them. Potential U.S. operations in Mexico against Cartels forces could result in a drawn out costly campaign in both U.S. blood and treasure. To commit U.S. ground forces to control illicit corridors and provide protection to border villages while vital economic programs are established will require the support of the U.S. people. As demonstrated in the case studies control of the illicit corridors is vital to stopping the flow of personnel, weapons, and funding that perpetuates the cycle of violence. This requirement should not be shared by U.S. forces alone, and must be done in a coordinated effort with our Mexican allies. When conducting joint operations the majority of manpower should be provided by Mexican forces trained and equipped to address the un-conventional threat the Cartels pose. This strategy has been used extensively during the transition period in Afghanistan, with positive results, to address the harsh terrain, size of the border, and nature of the enemy.

The border region of the United States-Mexico is defined by the U.S. Border Patrol, “as the area of land being 100 kilometers (62.5 miles) north and south of the international boundary (La Paz Agreement). It stretches approximately 2,000 miles from the southern tip of Texas to California, and the population for

this expanse of land is estimated to be approximately 12 million inhabitants.”<sup>46</sup> In a coordinated effort with our Mexican allies to improve border security, and control the illicit corridors, economic opportunities can and must be created.

## **Economic**

The contributing economic factors are a reason for, and possibly a solution to the violence in occurring in Mexico. In a key note speech delivered October 20, 2011 by General Barry R. McCaffery, USA (Ret) to the U.S. Army War College titled Hybrid Threat: Crime, Terrorism, & Insurgency in Mexico he stated,

“The short term problem – chief among the realities they’re facing in Mexico – is that somewhere between \$19-\$35 billion dollars a year of drug-related commerce is being generated there. The numbers vary depending on your source, but the impact is clear. That amount of money is a blowtorch that melts democratic institutions. It establishes a level of violence – a sophistication of violence – that is perpetuated in and among 120,000 people directly involved with the drug cartels.”<sup>47</sup>

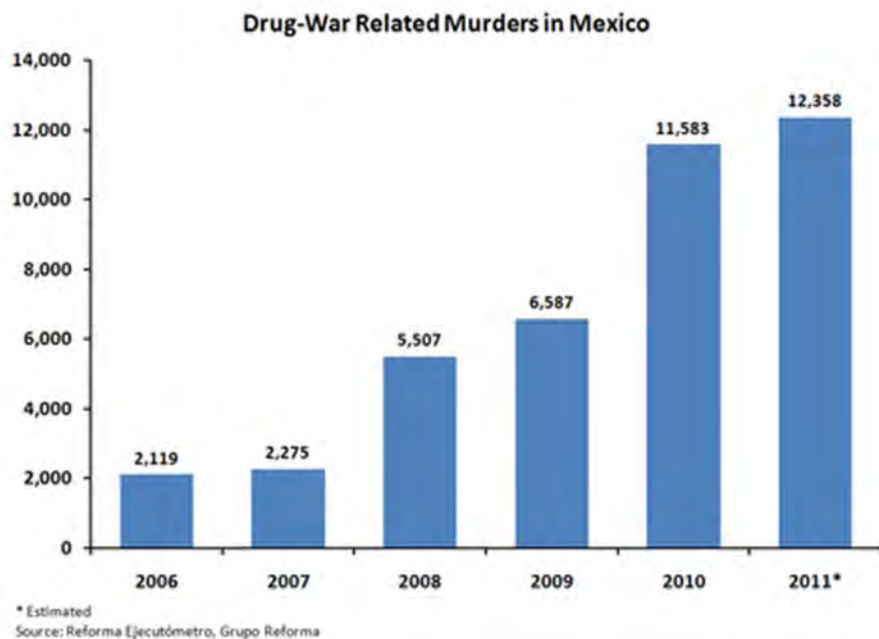
This amount of wealth associated with the narco-trade and the cascading effects it creates must be addressed.

Opponents of the current Merida Initiative maintain it does not account for the major reasons drug trafficking is occurring across the U.S./ Mexican border in the first place. These proponents maintain demand in the U.S., and poverty in Mexico are the key economic reasons for the problem. The opposition group to the Merida Initiative, Watch Group for Peace, stated, “Widespread drug use in the U.S. makes drug trafficking a lucrative venture. U.S.-designed trade policies such as NAFTA exacerbate Mexico’s impoverishment. Currently 50 million people live in poverty in Mexico. Deeply impoverished and unemployed people in Mexico have three options for survival: migration, tenuous and often dangerous work in the informal economy, and crime.”<sup>48</sup> In such conditions, similar to Pakistan and Peru, illicit organizations find easy prey among the poor. Alternative economic solutions to build an economy and provide other options than the drug trade must be implemented as part of an effective strategy.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime defined alternative development as:

“ A process to prevent and eliminate the illicit cultivation of plants containing narcotics and psychotropic substances through specifically designed rural development measures in the context of sustained national growth and sustainable development efforts in countries taking action against drugs, recognizing the particular socio-economic characteristics of the target communities and groups, within the framework of a comprehensive and permanent solution to the problem of illicit drugs.”<sup>49</sup>

This U.N. model could readily be adapted to addressing the cultivation of narcotics similar to programs currently being used in Afghanistan, and could avoid scenarios similar to Peru where the illicit economy built on narcotics was never dismantled. By creating economic alternatives the violence rate that has steadily increased in Mexico, since the Drug War began, could be reduced.



(table 5)

The Cartel sponsored violence that has occurred in Mexico over the last 7 years, and the increased U.S. initiatives taken to counter this violence is staggering. As a result of the violence the United States has witnessed an increase in illegal immigration that has stretched U.S. government organizations to their breaking points. This increase in immigration coupled with the Merida Initiative has cost U.S. tax payers 2.1 billion dollars since 2008, and little success or improvement can be shown. The United States remains vulnerable to violence spill over and must address the issue.

An unstable Mexico on the U.S. Southwestern border provides America's adversaries with a staging ground to conduct and sustain devastating operations on U.S. soil. Further narco- insurgent sponsored violence will lead to economic and political instability that the U.S. government will have to eventually address. Like the violence experienced in Afghanistan and Colombia the violence occurring in Northern Mexico has escalated in the last seven years and is being transmitted across the U.S. border, similar to the case studies of Pakistan and Peru. Similar situations in recent history demonstrate that violence is a destabilizing force, and if left unchecked violence and its contributing factors, can spread very quickly. Nefarious actors destabilize regions and perpetuate the spread violence as a result of permissive borders, illicit corridors, and interconnected economic networks that allow illicit networks safe havens leading to the transmission of violence across borders. The United States must address these issues, and their root causes, if security is desired along the Southwestern border and within the heart land.

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